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ABSTRACT

Recently, there have been several convincing demonstrations that nonverbal behaviors are key elements in influencing client judgments of counselor credibility. A study was conducted to examine the sensitivity of the self-reported reliance on nonverbal behaviors, as assessed by the Verbal/Nonverbal Reliance Questionnaire (VNRQ), to the actual changes in nonverbal behaviors. Two stimulus tapes, one tape containing counselor responsive and the other counselor unresponsive nonverbal behaviors, were developed and shown to 127 high school students. The students rated the expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the counselor, and indicated the degree to which they relied on nonverbal cues (eye contact, smile, voice, and gestures) in making their judgments. The results indicated that participants who reported a higher reliance, in contrast to a lower reliance, on nonverbal cues showed a greater sensitivity to changes in nonverbal behaviors. The findings suggest that self-reported reliance on nonverbal behavior, as measured by the VNRQ, may be a sensitive and convenient method of obtaining information about the contribution of nonverbal behavior in a client's perception of the counselor. (Author/NB)

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Self-Reported Reliance on Nonverbal Behavior

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Abstract

This study examined the sensitivity of self-reported reliance on nonverbal cues to actual changes in nonverbal behaviors. Two stimulus tapes, one tape containing counselor responsive and the other counselor unresponsive nonverbal behaviors, were developed and shown to 127 high school students. The students rated the expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the target person, and indicated the degree to which they relied on nonverbal cues in making their judgments. The results indicated that participants who reported a higher reliance (in contrast to a lower reliance) on nonverbal cues showed a greater sensitivity to changes in nonverbal behaviors. The findings were discussed.

Self-Reported Reliance on Nonverbal Behavior

Recently, there have been several convincing demonstrations that nonverbal (NV) behaviors are key elements in influencing client judgments of counselor credibility (e.g., Corrigan, Dell, Lewis & Schmidt, 1980; Tepper & Haase, 1978).

In order to obtain information about the client's perceived influence of verbal and NV behaviors, Lee, McGill, and Uhlemann (in press) developed the Verbal/Nonverbal Reliance Questionnaire (VNRQ), which is a pencil-and-paper questionnaire asking subjects to indicate the influence of verbal and NV cues in making judgments about another person. Employing the VNRQ, Lee, McGill, and Uhlemann (in press) examined how self-reported reliance on verbal and NV behaviors influenced clients' perceptions of counselors. Thirty-two counselors conducted a 20-minute counseling interview with clients, and immediately after the interview, the clients rated three attributes (expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) of the counselor. They then indicated the degree to which they relied on verbal and NV cues in judging these attributes. The findings showed that clients relied more on NV cues in judging counselor attractiveness and more on verbal cues in judging counselor expertness.

At present, it is unclear what actually is measured by VNRQ ratings of verbal and NV behaviors. The purpose of this study was to examine the sensitivity of the self-reported reliance on NV behaviors, as assessed by the VNRQ, to the actual changes in NV behaviors. We predicted that the participants who report a greater reliance on NV behaviors would show a greater difference (i.e., greater sensitivity) in perceived expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of a target person exhibiting responsive and unresponsive NV behaviors.

Method

Two brief stimulus tapes, varying in the amount of responsive counselor NV behaviors, were developed. One hundred and twenty-seven participant-observers viewed the tapes, rated the target person (i.e., the counselor) on three counselor attributes, and then indicated their reliance on verbal and NV behaviors in making their judgments. Based on the NV reliance scores, the participants were classified into high and low reliance groups and were compared in their sensitivity to the presence of varying amounts of responsive NV behaviors.

Participants

The original observers were 127 twelfth-grade students recruited from a rural high school in Ontario, Canada. Of the 127 students, 40 high and 40 low on NV reliance were selected on the basis of their NV reliance scores of the VNRQ.

The VNRQ was employed to assess participants' reliance on NV behaviors in rating the counselor attributes. The participants were asked to report their reliance on four nonverbal cues (eye contact, smile, voice, and gestures) in judging three counselor attributes (expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness). Specifically, the subjects were asked to assign numbers ranging from 0 ("did not rely") to 100 ("relied heavily") for each of the four nonverbal categories. Reliance scores for each participant were obtained by summing the scores for each category of nonverbal cues under each attribute. For the purpose of the present study, the arithmetic mean of the four NV category scores for each counselor attribute was designated as a NV reliance score.

Each counselor attribute was represented by four adjective-pairs randomly drawn from the Counselor Rating Form--Short Version (CRF-S; Corrigan & Schmidt, 1983). The polarities of adjective-pairs as well as the position of

nonverbal cues under each adjective-pair were randomized. Each adjective-pair was presented on a 7-point rating continuum, such that the total score for expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness ranged from 4 to 28, respectively. Based on NV reliance scores of the entire group, the participants were classified into high and low NV reliance groups.

The high reliance group (N = 40) was composed of those whose NV reliance scores (M = 70.50) fell in the top 31% of the entire student sample (M = 52.34, SD = 16.49). The low reliance group (N = 40) was composed of those whose NV reliance scores (M = 37.60) fell in the bottom 31% of the group. The 47 participants whose NV reliance scores fell between the two groups were excluded from the final analysis of the data.

Stimulus Tapes

The stimulus tapes were two 10-minute role-playing segments of a male counselor interviewing a female client presenting the concern of choosing a college major. The counselor and client were the same in both segments. Although the verbal content of the counselor and client interactions was different in each segment the level of counselor verbal facilitation was not significantly different between the two tapes. The means for empathy ratings by two independent judges were 2.67 and 2.57 on a 5-point scale. The two tapes differed only in the counselor's NV behavior. In the responsive tape, the counselor exhibited responsive NV behaviors (Claiborn, 1979; Haase & Tepper, 1972) which were defined as 80% eye contact, 8 smiles, 8 hand-and-arm gestures, and 8 head-nods. In the unresponsive tape, the counselor exhibited unresponsive NV behaviors which consisted of 40% eye contact, 4 smiles, and 4 hand-and-arm gestures, 4 head-nods. For a validity check, 10 Master's level counselor trainees viewed the

two tapes, and independently counted the frequency of head-nod, smile, and gesture, and the duration of eye contact. The responsive tape showed significantly higher ($p < .001$) means on all four NV behaviors (i.e., eye contact, smile, gesture, head-nod).

Data Collection

The participants, in small groups of 10, viewed the two tapes on one occasion. After each tape, the participants rated expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the counselor and then indicated their reliance on NV cues in making their judgments. The order of the responsive and unresponsive tapes was counterbalanced to eliminate any possible order effect. (A pilot study indicated that changing the order of presentation of the two tapes had no noticeable effect on the observers.)

Results

Scores for the dependent variables (i.e., expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) as assessed by the CRF-S were analyzed by a 2 (NV Reliance: high, low) x 2 (Tape: responsive, unresponsive) x 3 (Attributes: expertness, trustworthiness, attractiveness) analysis of variance with the last two factors treated as repeated factors. The multivariate F between Tape x Reliance was significant, $F(3, 76) = 6.54$, $p < .001$. Univariate interactions were statistically significant beyond the .01 level for expertness, $F(1, 78) = 19.48$, trustworthiness, $F(1, 78) = 8.08$, and attractiveness, $F(1, 78) = 9.57$. As can be seen from Table 1, for all three attributes (i.e., expertness, trustworthiness, attractiveness), the participants gave higher positive ratings for the counselor in the responsive tape than in the unresponsive tape. The mean differences between the responsive and the unresponsive tapes were significantly greater ($p < .01$) for the high NV reliance

than for the low NV reliance group ($\underline{M}$ = 11.29 vs. 7.19 for high and low group, respectively).

Insert Table 1 about here

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the validity of self-reported reliance on NV behaviors by examining the sensitivity of the VNRQ in assessing experimentally manipulated behaviors. As was predicted, the self-reported reliance on NV behaviors as assessed by the VNRQ was sensitive to actual change in NV behaviors: that is, when the NV behaviors of the target person were manipulated those who reported a higher reliance on NV behaviors showed a greater change in the perceived level of expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the target person than those who reported a lower reliance on NV behaviors.

The findings of the present study clearly showed that self-reported reliance on NV behavior, as measured by the VNRQ, may be a sensitive and convenient method of obtaining information about the contribution of NV behavior in a client's perception of the counselor. It appears that much reliance on NV behavior is out of the immediate awareness of the client. Regardless, it seems that the VNRQ measures a person's self-reported preference for NV behaviors in making judgments about other people. It is important to note in this study that the self-reported reliance on NV behaviors was obtained under highly controlled laboratory conditions and with observers rather than real clients. However, these initial findings suggest that this instrument may be of use in studying the complexity of counselor-client NV interactions.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Expertness, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness Ratings on the Two Stimulus Tapes

	Responsive Tape		Unresponsive Tape	
Variable	M	SD	M	SD
High nonverbal reliance group				
Expertness	21.60	3.46	9.60	4.29
Trustworthiness	24.58	2.47	13.85	5.48
Attractiveness	22.18	2.92	11.03	5.47
Low nonverbal reliance group				
Expertness	16.25	5.12	9.30	3.83
Trustworthiness	20.23	4.59	13.13	4.45
Attractiveness	17.53	5.46	10.00	4.20

Note: Possible range of scores: 4-28 for expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, respectively, with the higher score indicating favorable perception of the target person.